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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: GAZA HUMANITARIAN UPDATE -- DECEMBER 30

11. (SBU) Summary: An estimated 100 truckloads of humanitarian supplies entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing and five truckloads entered through Rafah on December 30, according to PA Crossing Authority contacts. The Gaza power plant was forced to shut down its only functioning turbine around 0300. Gaza medical clinics remain underequipped to deal with the large number of casualties. In a briefing to donors, UNRWA officials emphasized that access through the crossings is the most vital component in meeting humanitarian needs in Gaza, and stressed the urgency of opening Karni and Nahal Oz for wheat and fuel deliveries. End Summary.

Humanitarian Access

12. (SBU) Approximately 100 truckloads of humanitarian supplies entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom crossing on December 30, according to PA Crossing Authority contacts. Approximately 60 trucks went to UNRWA and other international agencies and 40 to the private sector. Five trucks with humanitarian goods entered Gaza from Egypt through the Rafah crossing as of 1600, and local press reports additional supplies donated by Arab countries are being transferred. UNRWA contacts report that its most urgent priority is restarting food distribution to 750,000 Gazans and emphasized the critical need to open all commercial crossings, especially Karni, because of its conveyor system used to transport wheat and other bulk items.

13. (SBU) The wheat shortage is the most urgent food need in Gaza, according to UNRWA. Bakeries remain closed, and UNRWA's emergency food program has been suspended since December 18. Local contacts report few stores in Gaza remain open, and food prices have risen beyond already high levels, leading to hoarding.

Fuel Shortage

14. (SBU) The Gaza power plant was forced to shut down its only functioning turbine around 0300 on December 30, according to OCHA. GEDCO (Gaza's main power distributor) reports that the average daily power cuts throughout the northern half of the strip last up to 16 hours/day. UNRWA reports most locations in northern Gaza have only 4-6 hours of electricity; other areas have up to 8 hours. No fuel (petrol or diesel) has entered Gaza through the crossings since December 26, and the Gaza Gas Station Owners Association reported to OCHA that no fuel has transferred through Rafah border tunnels because of IDF attacks.

Medical Update

15. (SBU) Gaza hospitals and clinics remain understaffed and underequipped to deal with the large number of casualties. The four truckloads of medical supplies that entered on December 29 re-supplied 90 or 105 essential medicines, and

120 of 225 consumable medical items. However, an ICRC spokesman stated publicly that the ICRC remains "in desperate need of supplies" and that the organization has received only a fraction of its needs. Dr. Mahmoud al-Khozendar of Gaza City's al-Shifa Hospital publicly reported on December 30 that "people are suffering and dying because of (these) shortages." UNRWA representatives report that those with injuries such as shattered bones or torn limbs are being turned away because of the lack of capacity to treat them.

Evacuation of Critical Condition Patients

16. (SBU) According to UNRWA, the Medical Referral Abroad program, managed by the Ministry of Health in Ramallah, has been defunct since the medical workers strike in Gaza in September. As a result, few emergency medical cases are exiting through Erez to hospitals in Jerusalem or the West Bank. UNRWA reports it took 72 hours to coordinate the exit of an UNRWA student with a shrapnel head wound through Erez. Embassy Cairo reports around 40 wounded Gazans were allowed into Egypt on December 29 for medical treatment.

Cash

17. (SBU) The shortage of cash in Gaza banks has exacerbated the humanitarian situation, according to local contacts. UNRWA has nearly 10,000 staff and 7,000 job creation program (JCP) beneficiaries, but was unable to pay JCPs and has only paid 50% of regular staff salaries in December. UNRWA was forced to stop payments to 94,000 special hardship cases in November. UNRWA's early December request for the GOI to permit the transfer of USD 20m and NIS 20m from the West Bank

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remains outstanding.
WALLES